

■ **ESTABLISHED IN 1998, UK CONTAINER MAINTENANCE (UKCM) IS A FAMILY-RUN** refurbishment company offering mobile and factory repairs and refurbishments for all sizes of waste containers.

When initially starting the business, co-founders Julian and Emma Elston struggled to get financial backing, having had their business plans laughed at. But they believed they had recognised a potential need within the waste and recycling industry and forged ahead, spending £30,000 on their personal credit cards to finance the business start-up.

The Elstons had recognised that councils and waste companies had significant levels of capital and resources tied up in waste and recycling containers that were in need of repair. So the company's plan was to provide a service that would bring these containers back to workable condition, while saving the customer money. The business concept was simple: save money for councils and waste firms by recycling their current assets rather than having to buy new.

Because bin refurbishment was relatively unheard of in the industry at the time, there was a lot of scepticism surrounding the service UKCM could provide. In response, the company initially targeted local authorities, offering free demonstrations to showcase its capabilities and outline the benefits in refurbishing existing containers rather than buying new. What became clear was that UKCM fitted into a gap in the market and, as a result, the company began to build a strong customer base.

In the past couple of years UKCM has seen its greatest growth, which can be associated with the increasing profile given to environmental issues such as reducing carbon footprints, reusing and recycling products and the drive to reduce overall spend. With the ability to refurbish a container back to workable condition at a third of the price of buying a new replacement container, UKCM has been able to offer the ideal solution to reducing overall costs whilst ticking the 'green box'.

The company expanded from its head office in

Bins brought back to life

AT A GLANCE

How a simple business plan to save councils and waste companies money by refurbishing their containers has resulted in UKCM working for 250 councils and 50 waste companies, refurbishing more than 75,000 containers a year

A business built around refurbishing waste containers was initially laughed at, but tighter budgets and a greater focus on reuse has led to the business thriving, writes **Claire Nicholls**

Cheshire to a second site in Essex in November 2010. It anticipates introducing a third site in Scotland by the end of 2012. This expansion is in recognition of the fact that, to reduce the carbon footprint and costs further for customers, it was vital that the company moved closer to several large customer bases.

Currently, UKCM works for around 250 councils and 50 waste companies, refurbishing more than 75,000 bins a year. It estimates to have saved customers around £50m.

With more than 13 years' experience, the company prides itself on identifying and responding to the needs of the market. This prompted UKCM to work alongside Cheshire West and Chester Council to provide industry expertise and technical knowledge to support a recycling initiative: converting redundant glass banks into bring banks for waste electrical and electronic equipment. Due to the success of the reconditioned bring banks, UKCM has expanded its services into manufacturing new banks to meet nationwide demand.

The company hopes to continue to raise awareness and push refurbishment to the forefront of the waste and recycling industry as the most environmentally friendly and cost-effective service available. As one of its customers summed up: "Saving our authority money and UKCM doing all the work – you can't get better than that!" ■

Claire Nicholls is planning and production manager at UKCM

There are significant levels of capital tied up in waste containers in need of repair all over the country



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